

Keeping Your Teenager Safe on the Road



Most teens view getting a driver's license as a sign of increased freedom, while many parents view this same event in terms of the increased risk to their children's safety. According to the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), teens have the highest crash risk of any age group, making collisions the leading cause of death for young people age 15 to 20. Inexperience, risk-taking behavior and peer pressure can all combine to make the road a dangerous place for young drivers.

Parents need to become educated about the risks associated with teen driving and then take action to help their teenagers make safe, smart decisions behind the wheel.

Tips for Parents

- **Be a good role model.** Long before your teen enrolls in a driver education course, he or she will be observing your driving habits. Set a good example by always wearing your seatbelt, never using your cell phone while driving, obeying traffic laws and driving defensively.
- **Set restrictions.** Talk with your teen about the behaviors that you expect him or her to adopt when behind the wheel. Insist that your teen wear a seatbelt at all times; seatbelt use is not only required by law in many states, it can save lives. Set rules for high-risk conditions such as night driving, driving with other teen passengers and driving in poor weather conditions.
- **Discuss consequences.** Driving is a privilege, not a right. Talk with your teens about the consequences of breaking the rules that you have set. If your teen demonstrates that he or she is not responsible enough to follow the rules, take the car privileges away.
- **Be available.** Make sure your teen knows that it is okay to call you if he or she is in trouble and needs a ride home. Your teen needs to understand that it is far better to call home for a ride than to get in a car with a driver who has been drinking, doing drugs or demonstrating other dangerous behavior.
- **Let your teen take the wheel.** By allowing your teen to drive with you in the car, you will be able to determine where your teen needs more practice. Plan a series of practice sessions in a wide variety of situations, including night driving.
- **Learn the laws in your state.** Many states are adopting graduated licensing restrictions for new drivers. These programs are designed to help new drivers gain experience slowly until they are ready to take on the full responsibilities that come along with driving.
- **Create a driving contract.** Sit down with your teen and create a driving contract that specifically outlines the behaviors that are and are not allowed, the consequences for breaking the contract, any maintenance expectations and other issues. Make sure that there is a section in the contract that centers on your own responsibilities.

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